

A CRITIQUE OF THE PRE-WRATH RAPTURE THEORY

May 13, 1998 (Fundamental Baptist Information Service, www.wayoflife.org) - The following article is by Dr. Thomas M. Strouse, Tabernacle Baptist Seminary, 717 N. Whitehurst Landing Rd., Virginia Beach, VA 23464. 804-420-5476). (here is another review of the false pre-wrath position at the Way of Life web site under the Prophecy section of the End Times Apostasy Database. It is titled ["Rapture: A Timely Question."](#))

INTRODUCTION

The recent crisis in the Gulf has created an intense interest in eschatology. One indication of this interest is the recent book by Marvin Rosenthal entitled *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. Rosenthal dedicates 20 chapters, 25 illustrations and 115 endnotes in his book to "prove" a "new understanding of the rapture" in the current imbroglio among pre-Millenarians. Although Rosenthal presents some Biblical statements with which advocates of the pre-Tribulation Rapture (PTR) would agree, he postulates several exegetical fallacies which may cause others to tergiversate the PTR position as he did.

FALLACY # ONE: The Day of the Lord is not the same as the Period of the Tribulation and Millennium.

To start the Day of the Lord (DOL) with the beginning of the Tribulation "is perhaps the single greatest error in the debate" (p. 117). The twenty three references to the DOL refer to the indefinite and short period of time at the end of the last three and a half years of the Tribulation, according to Rosenthal (p. 118). This is the crux of the Pre-Wrath Rapture (PWR) position, and Scripture must not dismantle this edifice for Rosenthal's premise to stand. However, Isaiah uses the expression "in that day" (bayyom hahua) to refer to the same period of the DOL (yom lajehovah) in Isaiah 2:11,12. Isaiah builds on this unity of expressions throughout the rest of his book, depicting the Tribulation and Millennium as aspects of the DOL (cf. Isa. 4:1,2; 11:10,11; 13:6,9,13; et al). Furthermore, the Scriptures demand that the DOL includes the first three and a half years of the Tribulation. Matthew refers to the time before the Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:21) as the "beginning of sorrows" (v. 8). The "sorrows" (odinon) is the NT counterpart for the Hebrew chavalim, and both words refer to the birth pangs of a women in labor. Isaiah implements chavalim to refer to the sorrows of the DOL (Isa. 13:6,8,9), which Matthew interprets as the whole Tribulation, including the first three and a half years. A superficial examination of Scripture eviscerates Rosenthal's major premise and shows that it is fallacious because of his sophmoric exegesis.

FALLACY # TWO: The Church Age Saints enter part of Daniel's Seventieth Week.

Most advocates of the PTR position argue that Daniel's seventy weeks refer to the Lord's eschatological program for Israel, not for the Church Age saints. However Rosenthal blurs the distinction between the nation of Israel and the NT Christians (p. 263). Consequently, he fails to realize that Mt. 24 is the eschatological program for Israel based on Daniel 9, and that I Thess. 4 and 5 is the eschatological program for the NT Christian (after all, Paul was the Apostle to the Gentile Christians). Rosenthal's strongest argument is his interpretation that the passage of Mt. 24:40,41 is teaching the rapture is inside the Tribulation Week period (pp. 220;304-305).

Unfortunately, some advocates of the PTR position hold this unbiblical position as well. The context of this passage teaches that those taken in the flood were taken in judgment (vv. 38,39). Likewise, those taken in verses 40 and 41 are taken in judgment, and those left are left for blessing. The OT passage of Zechariah 14:16 prepares the hearer and/or reader of Christ's Olivet Discourse for this truth: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." Both Zechariah 14 and Mt. 24 deal with the end of the Tribulation period and the ones left are allowed to enter the Millennium. Again, Rosenthal's fallacious premise crumbles because of weak exegesis.

FALLACY # THREE: The Concept of Imminency must be Redefined.

Rosenthal questions this accepted definition of imminence: "Imminence is the belief that no prophesied events must occur before the Rapture of the Church" (p. 149). He uses three arguments to question imminency. 1) According to Joel 2:31, cosmic disturbances come before the Great DOL. However, he ignores the fact that just as there is a "Great" Tribulation during the Tribulation period, there is a "Great" DOL during the DOL. 2) According to Mal. 4:5,6, Elijah must come before the Great DOL. However, Rosenthal ignores that Christ states that John the Baptist could have been the Elijah fulfillment (Mt. 11:13,14) and that Christ claims now to be the Elijah fulfillment at the Rapture (Mt. 17:10-13; Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; cf. restore, restitution). 3) According to II Thess. 2:3-8, apostasy will occur before the Day of Christ (DOC). A careful study of this passage indicates that the Man of Sin will be revealed after the hinderer is removed (vv. 3,8). The one hindering the Son of Perdition (Antichrist) must be more powerful in order to restrain him, and consequently, the hinderer must be a member of the Trinity (i.e., the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, Paul indicates that the Church Age is characterized by Apostasy (I Tim. 4:1-5) and that it will culminate with the Great Apostasy (II Thess. 2:3). This passage does not undermine the imminency of the PTR position. Rosenthal's oscillancy to careful exegesis betrays his fallacious position.

FALLACY # FOUR: The Rapture and the Revelation refer to the same event.

Rosenthal must equate the Rapture, which proponents of the PTR position believe will occur before the Tribulation, with the Revelation, which occurs after the Tribulation (p. 223). Even if Rosenthal's first three premises (Fallacies #1, #2, & #3) were true, Scripture shows major distinctions between the Rapture and the Revelation. For instance, Zech. 14:1-4 states that Christ will return after the Tribulation, will touch the earth and will judge the nations. Whereas, I Thess. 4:13-5:10 states that Christ will return before the DOL, will catch up believers in the air, and will not judge the nations at this time. Again, improper exegesis refutes the PWR position.

CONCLUSION

It is unfortunate that Rosenthal, who admittedly held to the PTR position for 35 years, could abandon this Biblical position for his unique, hybrid position based on superficial and weak exegesis. However, this may point out a common problem among those holding the PTR position; namely, preachers and teachers hold the right positions for reasons unknown.

This reviewer, who is not trying to refute every point of Rosenthal's position, nor is he trying to develop a full-blown study of eschatology, is offering the following PTR scenario. Christ will

rapture those "in Christ" (fulfilling the Elijah prophecy), the DOL (Tribulation and Millennium) will begin, the Man of Sin will be revealed, the Great Tribulation will begin the last three and a half years of the Tribulation, the battle of Armageddon will commence and consummate during the Great Tribulation, there will be cosmic disturbances, Christ will return with NT saints to judge the nations, and He will set up the Millennium.

May all realize that the Christian is not looking for signs during the Tribulation, but for the Savior before the Tribulation "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). ??